

French's Acting Edition No. 831

FIND THE LADY

A Comedietta in One Act

by

IAN HAY

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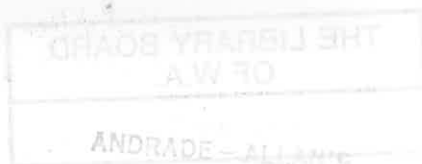
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IAN HAY



276 COLLINS STREET
MELBOURNE

SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED
LONDON

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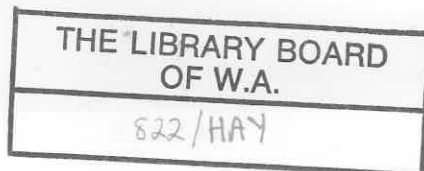
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ON

CHARACTERS

SOPHY.

MR. BINDLE.

MAJOR TUCKLE.

MRS. MILLINGTON.

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SCENE

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FIND THE LADY

SCENE.—MRS. MILLINGTON'S *Drawing-room.*

TIME.—*About three o'clock on a summer afternoon.*

It is a pleasant, bright room. Open French windows at back lead out on to the garden. There is a door R. and a fireplace L. Each side of the fireplace comfortable arm-chairs. Up R. is a table with draughts set and photograph of the Vicar. A round table C. carries a hand of patience neatly laid out.

(*See Ground Plan of Scene.*)

At the rise of the CURTAIN, SOPHY, the maid, enters R., followed by NICHOLAS BINDLE. He is an elderly solicitor, with fresh complexion and grey whiskers. He is immaculately dressed and obviously nervous. He puts down his hat and umbrella on the table up R.

SOPHY. Will you please to take a seat, Mr. Bindle? Mrs. Millington will be in quite soon. (*Chattily.*) It's a nice afternoon.

BINDLE (*absently*). Is it? Was it? Will she?

SOPHY (*surprised*). Will she what, sir?

BINDLE. Mrs. Millington—will she be in soon, Sophy?

SOPHY. Yes, sir; I said so. Were you in a hurry, Mr. Bindle?

BINDLE. Were I——? Was I——? Yes, I *am* in a hurry, Sophy! Do you know where Mrs. Millington is?

SOPHY. She's out lunching, sir.

BINDLE (*agitated*). With whom?

SOPHY. At the vicarage, sir.

BINDLE (*relieved*). Oh!

SOPHY. But she'll be in to tea.

BINDLE. Thank you, Sophy.

SOPHY (*going*). Thank you, sir.

BINDLE (*suddenly fumbling in his pocket*). Er—Sophy.

SOPHY. Yes, sir?

BINDLE (*handing a coin*). For you, Sophy!

SOPHY (*astonished*). Oh, thank you, sir.

BINDLE. I'm sure it's your birthday. Good-bye—I mean, good afternoon! Shut the door when you go out, there's a good girl.

SOPHY. Yes, sir.

(*She goes out R., turning at the door to contemplate BINDLE, who is feverishly taking off his gloves. Left alone, BINDLE takes out his watch and holds it in his left hand while he feels his pulse with his right.*)

BINDLE. Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five—fifty-five!—seventy-five!—simply racing, simply racing! (*He takes a small mirror from his pocket and examines his tongue.*) Slightly coated! No wonder! (*He produces a phial out of his pocket and eats a tabloid.*) Ha! (*He pulls himself together and brings the small chair from table C. and sets it by the armchair down L. He then sits on the chair and lays his hand on the arm of the armchair. In a strained unnatural voice.*) Er—ah—Mrs. Millington, I have something to communicate to you.—No, that's awful! (*He rises, puts back the small chair and brings a footstool instead. Then he props up a large cushion in the armchair, to represent MRS. MILLINGTON, and kneels laboriously with one knee on the footstool.*) Mrs. Millington—no, that's too low! (*On a higher note.*) Mrs. Millington—no, that's too high! (*Striking a middle note.*) Mrs. Millington—come, that's better!—Agatha! You cannot have remained unconscious all these months—(*Pauses.*) You cannot have been insensible since Christmas— Oh, dear! (*He produces a legal-looking slip of blue paper from his pocket and prompts himself.*) Dear Sir, In re the last will and testament of the late Augustus Bagly— That's the wrong one! (*He pulls out another paper, and puts on eyeglasses.*) Ah, here we are! Insensible, since Christmas at least, that the friendship existing between us is no ordinary one—

Er—Sophy.

Sophy!

Good-bye—I
when you go

plate BINDLE,
Left alone,
in his left hand

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) Ha! (He
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here we are!
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(At this point the door R. opens and MAJOR TUCKLE appears. He is a red-faced old gentleman with a white moustache, dressed, like MR. BINDLE, in his best. SOPHY appears behind TUCKLE; but instead of going out by the door she crosses and disappears into the conservatory, evidently much interested in what is going on.)

(Huskily.) No ordinary one! Mrs. Millington!—Agatha—may I go so far as to describe you as my Agatha?—my angel—my goddess—

(TUCKLE comes forward and slaps him on the shoulder.)

My God! (His glasses fall on the floor, etc.)

TUCKLE (boisterously). Hallo, Bindle! Looking for sixpences?

BINDLE (rising, with dignity). No, Major Tuckle, I am not. I merely dropped my eyeglasses. Have you come to see Mrs. Millington?

TUCKLE. Do you think I've come to read the gas-meter, damn it? And have you any objection to my coming?

BINDLE. It is not for me to criticize Mrs. Millington's choice of friends. Unfortunately, the lady is out.

TUCKLE. Then why are you here? (Jealously.) By appointment?

BINDLE. To all intents and purposes, yes. Are you here by invitation?

TUCKLE. Invitation? Don't be an old fool, Bindle! I don't need an invitation; I just pop in and out as I like. There has never been any ceremony between Mrs. Millington and me.

BINDLE. No; and there never will be, if I can help it!

TUCKLE. Bindle, what do you mean?

BINDLE. What I said.

TUCKLE. What ceremony are you referring to?

BINDLE. Ah! The cap fits you, then!

TUCKLE. Cap? What do you mean—cap? Damme, sir, do you think a retired cavalry officer would wear a cap with a morning coat—like Harry Tate?

BINDLE. Why should you wear a morning coat at all,

in the country—and that absurd hat? (*He points to TUCKLE's hat, which is a grey topper, standing on table c.*)

TUCKLE (*seeing BINDLE's hat, a silk topper, on table up R.*). Well, what's that?

BINDLE. Part of my professional costume as the leading solicitor in this district. (*He takes up TUCKLE's hat. Furiously.*) Tuckle, what are these? (*He pulls out a bunch of carnations.*)

TUCKLE (*going across to BINDLE's hat and taking it up. Furiously.*) Great Caesar, what are these? (*He pulls out a large bunch of roses.*)

BINDLE (*icily*). My poor friend, surely your senses have not begun to fail you already! And you can't be more than seventy.

TUCKLE. Seventy? What the devil are you talking about? I'm fifty-six—the prime of life! And what do you mean—senses?

BINDLE (*indicating roses*). Look at them, man—smell them! They're roses: her favourite flower! (*Simpering.*) She told me so.

TUCKLE (*furiously*). Bosh! Bilge! Balderdash! (*Pointing to the carnations.*) Those are her favourite flowers! I have her word for it.

BINDLE. I will ask her when she comes in. I will mention that you called, if you like.

TUCKLE. Thank you, I shall be here! (*They glare at each other.*)

(*There is a pause.*)

BINDLE. Tuckle, let us be frank with one another: let us be reasonable. I admit I am here for the same purpose as you—

TUCKLE. You've got a nerve, Bindle—at your age!

BINDLE. I am fifty-three—a year or two before my prime—

TUCKLE. Prime? You're in your dotage! A lawyer at any age is twice as old as a soldier. I'm an open-air man: you sit fugging in an office—

BINDLE. Tuckle, let us talk this matter over calmly

(*He points to
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TUCKLE. Damn it, I am calm!

BINDLE. Dispassionately—impersonally. Listen! We are both here for the same reason, and considering that I was here first, I think it would be more delicate on your part to retire.

TUCKLE. I like that! You may have arrived before me, but I started first. You passed me on the road, and gave me your dust, too. Do you think you're going to ride rough-shod over me, just because you own a Ford car?

BINDLE. Austin!

TUCKLE. Ford!

BINDLE. Austin!

TUCKLE. Anyhow, I'm damn well going to stay here!

BINDLE. So am I!

(*They sit down.*)

TUCKLE (*presently*). Look here—you used to be a sportsman, Bindle. Let's toss for it.

BINDLE. My dear friend, we are not street-boys!

TUCKLE (*impatiently*). Well, let's fight a duel. Which is it to be—machine-guns at twenty yards, or brickbats at three-quarters of a mile?

BINDLE. Frivolity from you is merely depressing. Can't we—arbitrate? (*He rises, and walks to window.*)

TUCKLE. Who's going to be the arbitrator—that goggle-eyed parlourmaid? Bah!

BINDLE (*who has found a draughts board on the table up R.*). Listen! I have an idea. If you persist in declining to withdraw, I will play you a game of draughts, and the winner shall propose first.

TUCKLE (*angrily, rising and going to table c. where a patience hand is laid out*). Draughts are excluded!

BINDLE. Well—picquet? One hand.

TUCKLE. I don't play. (*Gathering up cards.*) Rummy?

BINDLE. I have never heard of the game.

TUCKLE. I'll tell you what. I'll cut you through the pack.

BINDLE. Pot-house language means nothing to me.

TUCKLE. It's quite simple. We place the pack on this table, and go on drawing in turn until one of us draws a certain card. He stays here and proposes to Mrs. Millington, and the other man goes home to bed until he's sent for.

BINDLE. A childish method of settling a dispute. However, I will humour you, Tuckle. What is the winning card to be?

TUCKLE. What's your suggestion?

BINDLE. Shall we say the King of Spades?

TUCKLE. What—old Mossy Face? Confound it, man, haven't you a spark of sentiment about you? The winning card shall be—the Queen of Hearts, and no other!

BINDLE (*warming up*). By all means, my boy. A felicitous choice.

(BINDLE gets the chair from wall R., brings it to R. of the table C. and sits. TUCKLE takes the chair from above table and sits opposite him. TUCKLE draws the first card.)

TUCKLE. Nine of Clubs!

BINDLE (*drawing rapidly*). Knave of Spades!

TUCKLE (*drawing rapidly*). Four of Hearts!

BINDLE (*drawing rapidly*). Six of Hearts!

TUCKLE (*drawing rapidly*). Ace of Spades!

BINDLE (*drawing rapidly*). Ace of Clubs!

TUCKLE (*drawing rapidly*). Ah! the Queen of—blast it!—Diamonds!

BINDLE (*drawing rapidly*). Nine of Spades!

TUCKLE (*drawing rapidly*). King of Hearts! That's a good omen for me, Bindle. The Queen is usually accompanied by the King, isn't she?

BINDLE (*dryly*). Or the Knave! You will recollect, Tuckle, that from all accounts the domestic relations of the Heart family were of the most unfortunate description. (*Drawing.*) Three of Diamonds!

TUCKLE (*drawing*). King of Spades!—Why didn't I agree to that when you suggested it?

BINDLE (*drawing*). Seven of Hearts!

TUCKLE (*drawing*). Six of Clubs!
 BINDLE (*drawing*). Knave of Diamonds!—I say, Tuckle!

TUCKLE (*drawing*). Five of Clubs. Well?
 BINDLE. Don't you think you'd better withdraw? You would be saving yourself a severe disappointment.

TUCKLE. Curse your impudence, sir!
 BINDLE. Mrs. Millington is hardly suited, with her refined and sensitive nature, to a man of your—ah—stamp. (*Drawing.*) Queen of Spades!

TUCKLE. And what the blazes do you mean by my "stamp," sir? It's not the six-and-eightpenny one, anyhow. (*Drawing.*) Five of Hearts!

BINDLE. Tuckle, you are getting excited. Calm yourself. (*Drawing.*) Hang it all, the two of Spades! At your age, and with your blood-pressure—

TUCKLE. For the last time, sir, will you leave my age alone? A man is as old as he feels. (*Drawing.*) King of Diamonds! I feel barely fifty now; I shall feel thirty-five when I set eyes on Mrs. Millington; I shall feel twenty-five when I clasp her dear little hand—

BINDLE. And as you leave the house, you'll feel about two-and-a-half! (*Drawing.*) Ten of Clubs!

(TUCKLE gets up and stamps about.)

TUCKLE. You miserable old mummy!
 BINDLE. I would rather look like a mummy than sound like a sea-lion!

TUCKLE. For two pins I'd throw you out of the window!

BINDLE (*calmly*). Threat of assault, accompanied by provocative language. Be careful!

TUCKLE. Bah! You miserable, pettifogging attorney! You orphan-robber! You widow-swindler! I know where your money comes from!

BINDLE (*furiously*). Stop! Wait! Your words are actionable. I shall ring the bell for a witness.

(MRS. MILLINGTON appears in the open window. She is a charming widow of thirty.)

Ah, my dear Mrs. Millington!

MRS. MILLINGTON (*coming down, smiling, and shaking hands with both*). How do you do, Mr. Bindle? How do you do, Major?

TUCKLE. Dear lady!

MRS. MILLINGTON. Aren't you a pair of lambs, to wait till I came in! I was lunching at the Vicar's. His sister goes away to-morrow, and I'm afraid I lingered for a last gossip with her. Be patient for five minutes longer, and we'll have some tea. (*Looking at table*.) I'm so glad you made yourselves at home. What was the game—cut-throat?

TUCKLE (*savagely*). Nearly.

BINDLE. Only figuratively, dear lady. It is a new game which my old friend has been teaching me. Childish, but diverting.

TUCKLE. Ha!

MRS. MILLINGTON (*quickly*). I love childish games. How do you play, Major Tuckle?

TUCKLE (*recovering himself*). We cut through the pack in turn——

BINDLE. And the man who draws a certain card——

BOTH (*together*). Takes the stake.

MRS. MILLINGTON. A big stake?

TUCKLE. Immense.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Immense?

BINDLE. Figuratively, only.

MRS. MILLINGTON. I think you are two dissipated old gentlemen.

BINDLE. Elderly, perhaps, but not dissipated!

TUCKLE. Dissipated, but not elderly!

(*Enter SOPHY from the conservatory with a basket and scissors.*)

MRS. MILLINGTON. Tea, please, Sophy. Are you getting the flowers for the dinner-table?

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Bring in the tea-tray, and I'll get the flowers myself.

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am.

(Exit SOPHY R., leaving basket and scissors.)

MRS. MILLINGTON. You're a great gardener, I know, Mr. Bindle. Will you come and help me? It will bore you, Major, so you shall have a cigarette in here. We shan't be five minutes.

TUCKLE (*excitedly*). Mrs. Millington, you shall not be left alone with that man.

MRS. MILLINGTON (*surprised*). Why not?

TUCKLE. Well—I don't like being alone myself. That's why I came here this—I mean, may I come too?

MRS. MILLINGTON. Certainly.

(*They go up to the conservatory.*)

TUCKLE. By the way, which is your favourite flower?

BINDLE (*eagerly*). Yes,—which?

MRS. MILLINGTON (*after consideration*). Lily-of-the-valley.

BOTH (*together, triumphantly*). There, you see!

(*They go out. SOPHY enters R. with folding tea-table. She puts it down on the hearthrug and lays cloth, etc.*)

SOPHY. Please, ma'am.

MRS. MILLINGTON (*coming back*). Yes?

SOPHY. Could I speak to you? It's serious.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Who is the lucky man this time, Sophy? The butcher's boy, or the postman?

SOPHY. It's none of them, ma'am. It's Mr. Bindle and the Major.

MRS. MILLINGTON. What? You mean to say those two old men—

SOPHY. Oh no, ma'am. It's about you.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Me?

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am. I wanted to say that you ought to be careful with them. With both of them.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Widows are always careful, Sophy. That is why they are widows. Now, what is it?

SOPHY. Well, ma'am, when Mr. Bindle called this

afternoon, I thought he had rather an odd look in his eye—and he had his Sunday clothes on, too—and when I said you wasn't at home he asked if he could wait. And when I said "Yes," he *was* pleased. He acted rather funny.

MRS. MILLINGTON. What did he do?

SOPHY. It was just the way he thanked me, ma'am. Then the Major called, and he looked the same, and acted the same—only twice as much.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Five shillings?

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am. I put both of them in here, and then I went into the conservatory.

MRS. MILLINGTON. To listen?

SOPHY (*with dignity*). I couldn't help overhearing something of what they said, ma'am.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Sophy, I rather think I ought to smack you.

SOPHY. I was only trying to do my duty, ma'am. They were talking about you. Those two old images have come here to— (*She nods her head.*)

MRS. MILLINGTON. To what?

SOPHY. To ask you to marry them!

MRS. MILLINGTON. Marry—both of them?

SOPHY (*eagerly*). No, only one. That's the trouble. They were each so vexed when they found the other here; and neither would go away. Mr. Bindle, *he* said—

MRS. MILLINGTON. Sophy, I *shall* smack you!

SOPHY. And Major Tuckle, *he* said—

MRS. MILLINGTON. Go away, before I do it!

SOPHY. But of course they had to decide which was to ask you first.

MRS. MILLINGTON. And which is to ask me first?

SOPHY. I couldn't say, ma'am, I'm sure. By that time I had realized that I was overhearing a private conversation, so of course I just stopped listening. (*Going to door R., and turning.*) But I did happen to hear one thing more, ma'am—when I was off my guard, of course.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Of course. What was it?

SOPHY. Something about cards—and the Queen of Hearts.

MRS. MILLINGTON (*gently, half to herself*). The Queen of Hearts? Was that the card they were trying to draw?

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Thank you, Sophy.

(SOPHY goes out. Left alone, MRS. MILLINGTON goes up to the conservatory entrance and looks off. Then she comes softly back, smiling to herself. She picks up the pack and picks out a card, then she crosses to the table R., where a framed photograph of a young clergyman stands. With a little laugh, she puts the card in an envelope, which she addresses. She notices the two hats standing side by side on the table R. She takes them up and sees the flowers inside.)

Pets! (*Calling off.*) Come in, both of you. Everything is here, except the kettle.

(Enter BINDLE and TUCKLE, glaring at each other.)

Tea will be ready in a moment. By the way, did you finish your game?

TUCKLE. No.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Well, why not finish it off while we're waiting?

BINDLE. It's of no consequence, dear lady, under present conditions.

MRS. MILLINGTON. I suppose the stake wasn't worth while.

TUCKLE. Not worth while? Come along, Bindle.

BINDLE. On the same terms? (*They regard each other fixedly for a moment, then TUCKLE nods, and they begin drawing cards again.*)

(*They call out the cards quickly, until there are only four left. BINDLE sits L. of the table, TUCKLE R., MRS. MILLINGTON stands behind, smiling down on them.*)

MRS. MILLINGTON. Only four left! And the winning card hasn't turned up yet. I can't bear it!

(BINDLE and TUCKLE pause. TUCKLE wipes his brow. BINDLE surreptitiously gets out a tabloid and eats it.)

BINDLE (*drawing*). Eight of Spades!

TUCKLE (*drawing*). Queen of—Clubs!

BINDLE (*drawing*). My last card! (*Despairingly.*) Four of Diamonds! (*He groans.*)

TUCKLE (*triumphantly turning up the last card*). And here at last is the Queen—confound and dash it!—the three of Spades! (*He explodes.*) Where the dev—ha—h'm!

BOTH (*accusingly to each other*). Where is the Queen of Hearts?

MRS. MILLINGTON (*much distressed*). Oh, was it the Queen of Hearts you needed? I'm so sorry. I took it out of the pack, just now.

TUCKLE. Why?

MRS. MILLINGTON. I—I wanted it.

BOTH. What on earth for?

MRS. MILLINGTON (*kneeling on the floor, with her elbows on the table*). I'll tell you the whole story. You shall be the first to know—old friends! (*She gives a hand to each.*) To-day I had a talk with the Vicar.

TUCKLE. Ah!

BINDLE. Oh!

MRS. MILLINGTON. Oddly enough, we were discussing card games. He said he used to be a constant bridge player at the University; but now he thought it better not to play at all, although he loved it. Wasn't that noble of him?

(*Both mumble, inarticulately.*)

Then—he asked me to marry him!

(BINDLE and TUCKLE start up.)

BINDLE. I fail to see the relevance of such a request.

MRS. MILLINGTON (*half to herself now*). But that was where he did it so beautifully. He asked me to be his Queen of Hearts!

TUCKLE. Nice language, for a parson!

MRS. MILLINGTON. Yes, wasn't it? So young—so boyish of him!

TUCKLE. You're right there, Mrs. Millington. A mere boy—that's all he is!

BINDLE. A legal infant, almost.

TUCKLE. Barely forty!

BINDLE. Thirty-eight, at the outside!

MRS. MILLINGTON. As a matter of fact, he is thirty-six. He told me so, this afternoon.

BOTH (*together*). Have you accepted him?

MRS. MILLINGTON. I asked for a little time to think it over. But now my mind is made up. I am so happy. (*She goes to the table R., takes up the card in the envelope, and rings the bell, then holds up the envelope and takes out the card.*) The Queen of Hearts! There's his answer. Is that terribly sentimental? Yes, of course it is! And I'm not ashamed of it, because I'm young! And I'm not ashamed to tell you about it (*she takes their hands*)—because you are young too. Young in heart and young in sympathy! Bless you both! You're the first to hear my news. I'm so happy!

(*Enter SOPHY with tea tray, she sets it on the table L.*)

(*MRS. MILLINGTON goes R. to her.*) Sophy, tell John to go over with this to the Vicarage at once, please.

SOPHY. Yes, ma'am.

(*She exits R.*)

MRS. MILLINGTON (*turning to BINDLE and TUCKLE*). Well, what have you got to say to me?

TUCKLE (*shaking hands*). Mrs. Millington, will you accept the heartiest congratulations of—an old fogey?

(*He gently kicks BINDLE, who is behind him, then passes R.*)

BINDLE (*taking the hint, and taking MRS. MILLINGTON's other hand*). Mrs. Millington, will you accept the very kindest wishes of one who has always regarded you as—a daughter?

(*They each kiss her hand.*)

MRS. MILLINGTON (*quite overcome*). Darlings! (*She releases her hands, and goes up stage, dabbing her eyes.*)

TUCKLE (*to BINDLE*). After all, she'll never know.

BINDLE. No. That's a comfort.

TUCKLE (*loudly*). Well, we must be off. Coming my way, Nick?

BINDLE. Rather—Jack! (*He slaps TUCKLE on the shoulder.*)

(*BINDLE and TUCKLE go up R., for their hats, surreptitiously stuffing the flowers well out of sight.*)

Good afternoon, dear Mrs. Millington.

MRS. MILLINGTON (*coming down L.*). But—tea?

TUCKLE. I'm afraid not, thank you. Bindle and I have a call to pay.

MRS. MILLINGTON. Another?

BINDLE. Yes. We're going to the Vicarage—to offer our felicitations to—the future King of Hearts!

TUCKLE. No—damn it!—The Knave! Come on, Nicky, my boy!

(*They go out, arm in arm, by window.* MRS. MILLINGTON runs and kisses her hands to them.)

CURTAIN.

GNOWANGERUP REPERTORY CLUB

Darlings! (*She
blinking her eyes.*)
never know.

ff. Coming my

TUCKLE on the

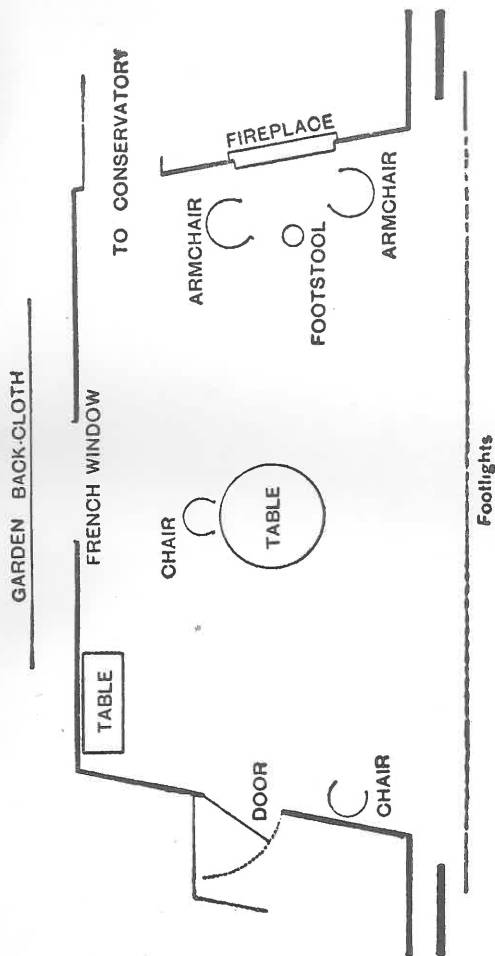
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But—tea?
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Hearts!
ve! Come on,

RS. MILLINGTON
hem.)

CLUB



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